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ACTION EAP-00

INFO LOG-00 NP-00 AID-00 CIAE-00 INL-00 DODE-00 DS-00  
E-00 FBIE-00 UTED-00 VC-00 H-00 TEDE-00 INR-00  
LAB-01 VCE-00 NSAE-00 NIMA-00 PA-00 SP-00 FMP-00  
SCRS-00 DSCC-00 PRM-00 DRL-00 G-00 NFAT-00 SAS-00  
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FM AMCONSUL HO CHI MINH CITY  
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 0972  
INFO AMEMBASSY HANOI PRIORITY  
ASEAN MEMBER COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

UNCLAS HO CHI MINH CITY 000127

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

DEPARTMENT FOR EAP/BCLTV, DRL

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: PHUM SOCI PREL PGOV KIRF VM

SUBJECT: GVN WISEMAN THANH ON CENTRAL HIGHLANDS AND USG RELATIONS

REF: A) Hanoi 254; B) Hanoi 215; C) 04 HCMC 1400; D) 04 HCMC 1587

E) 04 HCMC 1491 and previous

1. (SBU) Vo Viet Thanh, Special Advisor to the Prime Minister for the South, told us on February 1 that the GVN is determined to resolve problems related to the Montagnards in the Central Highlands despite opposition from some provincial officials and "conservative elements" in Hanoi. The GVN's tripartite MOU with the UNHCR and Government of Cambodia on Montagnard cross-border flight is part of this effort. More broadly, Thanh said that GVN efforts in the Central Highlands, its recent amnesty of prisoners of conscience, the facilitation of follow-to-join cases of Montagnards in Gia Lai province and other initiatives are part of an overall approach of the GVN to bridge differences and to develop a "strategic partnership" with the U.S. as a counterweight to China. End Summary.

Central Highlands and UNHCR

2. (SBU) Poloff met February 1 for a pre-Tet call with Special Advisor to the Prime Minister for the South, Vo Viet Thanh (protect). Thanh spoke at length about developments in the Central Highlands, the GVN's MOU with UNHCR on Montagnards in Cambodia and the direction of U.S.-Vietnam relations. (CG and Poloff last met him in early November - ref C). He said that he makes regular "inspection tours" of the Central Highlands on behalf of Deputy Prime Minister and Politburo member Nguyen Tan Dung. Thanh emphasized that the Dung -- as the GVN's point person for the Highlands -- is committed to implementing a GVN decision to resolve socio-economic and religious issues affecting Montagnards. However, local officials in the hardline provinces of Dak Lak and Dak Nong are resistant to follow the GVN's guidelines. Thanh explained that this hardline stance stems in part from Dak Lak's and Dak Nong's history as the center of armed anti-GVN resistance among Montagnards. (Note: Armed Montagnards resistance in Vietnam ended in 1992. End Note.) He said that prejudice, parochial and personal interests of local leaders in the two provinces also affect how Montagnards policies are implemented.

3. (SBU) Thanh observed that during a visit to the Central Highlands in late November, the Chairman of Gia Lai province complained that his more flexible approach to Montagnard issues left him politically vulnerable among his colleagues in the region and in Hanoi. Thanh said that he sought to reassure the provincial leader, a colleague of DPM Dung from the Mekong Delta, that his more progressive approach is not putting his political career at risk. This led Thanh to observe that conservative elements in Hanoi (which he would not further identify) also obstruct progress in the Central Highlands. Thanh said that these officials intentionally draft ambiguous guidance, giving provincial leadership the leeway to avoid implementing reforms.

4. (SBU) Thanh said that DPM Dung recently has begun to tighten GVN guidance to the Central Highlands. Concurrently, DPM Dung is planning a review of the Highlands in the near future. Any provincial official that is determined not to be complying with Hanoi's directives will be transferred, Thanh said. Thanh welcomed increased USG attention to the Central Highlands and said that he would do what he can to facilitate our access to the region as well as to resolve outstanding "Visas 93" cases of Montagnards seeking to join their families already in the United States.

5. (SBU) Thanh said that the GVN, after "internal debate" in late

2004, decided that it was in Vietnam's interest to work with UNHCR to deal with Montagnard cross-border migration to Cambodia. Shortly thereafter the GVN inked a tripartite MOU with the Government of Cambodia and UNHCR (ref B). Thanh did not offer any  
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